
A
SERMON,
PREACHED AT
SPRING GARDEN CHAPEL,
AND AT
OXFORD CHAPEL.

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THE MAN OF SIN.

A
SERMON,

PREACHED AT
SPRING GARDEN CHAPEL,
ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 26,

AND AT
OXFORD CHAPEL,
ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1794,

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF BOTH
CONGREGATIONS.

BY WILLIAM JONES, M.A. F.R.S.

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1794.

THE MARK OF SIN

SERMON

PREACHED AT

SPRING GARDEN CHAPEL

ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 30,

AND AT

OXFORD CHAPEL

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1854

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE

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1854

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SERMON, &c.

LUKE xii. 56.

How is it that ye do not discern this time?

GOD never calls upon us to discern the ways of his Providence, without giving us some signs, to direct and assist us in our judgment; who can no more comprehend the Divine counsels, without the Divine light, than we can behold the sun, without the assistance of his own rays.

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When our blessed Lord required the people to examine, and judge for themselves, from the signs which attended his coming, he called them to a pleasant as well as a profitable enquiry: for, as he then came to save the world, all the signs given to confirm his mission, explained the end of it, and were signs of salvation. The blind received their sight, the ears of the deaf were opened, the sick were healed, the dead were raised. Even the heathen poets, according to the expectation they had of so desirable an event, represent it under the most beautiful imagery, as the restoration of a golden age, in which man should recover that purity and happiness, of which he had so long been deprived by the corruption of his nature. And when these things were about to be fulfilled, we hear the servants of God, who were better informed, congratulating each other on the
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times they had lived to see : *Blessed art thou among women*, said Elizabeth to the holy Virgin : *Blessed are your eyes*, said the Lord to his disciples : many prophets and kings have desired to see the things which ye see, and have not seen them. The wise men of the east *rejoiced with exceeding great joy*, when they saw the star which directed them : the shepherds *glorified and praised God* for all the things which they had seen and heard : even the heavenly host uttered a song of triumph : the *heavens rejoiced*, and the *earth was glad*, when the Saviour was ushered into the world : all the signs of his birth, and of his ministry, were favourable and salutary, and inspired with hope and gladness all those who were wise enough to understand them.

Such were the sentiments of men and angels at his first appearance. His second

coming, to judge the world, hath also its signs; but none of them are pleasant: they are all alarming, all terrible; all partaking of the nature of that tremendous event in which they are to terminate: earthquakes, famines, pestilences, distress of nations; insurrections and tumults; disturbing the world, as storms agitate the wide waters of the sea: these are the things we are to look for. As bodily death is preceded by symptoms of a deadly sort; by terrors and faintings, and pangs, and convulsions; we have every reason to expect, that the world's death will be brought on by sins and disorders, upon a great scale, and of a new species. And here it is worth observing, that while men, by their perverseness, are *making the miseries* of the time, they are *marking its characters*: but, in ignorance; they know not what they do.

Herod

Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the rulers of the Jews, were all busy in bringing to pass what the hand and counsel of God had determined to be done; but without knowing it: they had ends and objects of their own, at which they were aiming for themselves; while they were fulfilling the purposes of God; and had they received any friendly hint of what they were doing, they would have rejected it with disdain, and probably have put the monitor to death.

The case is the same now. A considerable part of mankind are vehemently pursuing their own imaginations: and while they themselves are blind to the nature and consequences of their own actions, they are giving instruction to us: their darkness is our light: and I mean, with God's help, to use it as such upon the present occasion.

I am very sensible, that the attention of the public hath been nearly exhausted, and their curiosity fatiated, with the many fearful accounts transmitted to us, and the pious and pertinent reflexions made upon them by good and learned men. But still, there is a certain view of the subject, so edifying, that we can scarcely dwell too much upon it. As politicians, we enquire how far government may suffer from dangerous innovations : as a commercial nation, we consider how trade may be affected ; as a military people, we consult how war is to be carried on ; with what resources ; and what will be its probable issue. All this is very proper : but, as Christians, it is our duty to compare the signs of the time with what the Almighty Ruler of the world hath been pleased to open, concerning his own purposes, and the events to be expected as the world draws nearer to its end. I enter
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here upon no diffuse investigation ; but mean to confine myself to *one* remarkable sign of the last days, which I think hath never yet received an adequate interpretation ; not through the unskilfulness of interpreters ; but, because it seems to be one of those mysterious predictions, which nothing but the event can enable us to understand : and which a succession of future events may still be opening to us farther than we can see at present.

It seems, there was a persuasion very early in the Christian church, that the coming of Jesus Christ, to judge the world, was then near at hand. His judgment of the jewish nation had been foretold, in terms so applicable to his final judgment, that a mistake might thence arise, even among wise and pious Christians : of which St. Paul having heard, gives them proper information, in

that remarkable passage of the second chapter of the second epistle to the *Thessalonians*; wherein he warns them of a very extraordinary fact, which would precede the final destruction of this world; and that the end of all things was not to be expected, till this should have come to pass. The passage is this,—*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away (an apostacy) first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.* It may be proper, that the words, in which a prophecy is delivered, should have a certain degree of obscurity, that they may not open too much before the time: and the same happens partly from the necessity of the case; because the thing which hath not as yet

yet been known to the world, will be conceived with difficulty even from a plain description of it. This is applicable to the passage now before us; on which volumes have been written, with great uncertainty of interpretation; depending on facts, which however bad in their way, did certainly never come up to this description. But when the event brings its own interpretation with it, a child may see farther than the most learned could before: and if the whole passage be taken in its obvious sense, and with all its circumstances, it will apply itself so directly to a case in hand, that little doubt can remain in the mind of any reader, who has no reason for shutting his eyes against the truth.

We observe then, first, that a *falling away* should happen before the end of the world. The original calls it *an apostacy*; which term,
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in the mouth of a Christian apostle, can mean nothing but an apostacy from the Christian faith and worship. And this is more particularly said to consist in a revelation of a *man of sin*, the son of perdition. It is not necessary here to suppose, that this man of sin is only one individual person. In the tenth Psalm, when we read of the *man of the earth*, we do not understand a single person but a *character*, a sort of ungodly *people*, whose whole confidence is in this world. In like manner, the *man of sin* may very properly denote a particular sort of sinful character, or even the race of mankind, when become sinful in the extreme, according to that state of depravity, which is described in the words that follow. For, it seems, this man of sin *opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped*. Here the terms are less difficult in the original than in the

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the English. *All that is called God* is literally every person, every man, who is called God; and the word we translate *worshipped* expresses most properly that sort of worship, which is given to venerable or august persons, whatever the office may be that makes them such.

If we enquire who they are that are *called God*, it immediately occurs, that the expression cannot so properly denote *God himself* as the vicegerents of God; those who are *called by his name*. And who are they? The Scripture itself will answer us: *I have said, ye are gods*; which words are spoken of princes and rulers; as it is also said in the law (Exod. xxii. 28.) *thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people*; where the latter clause is but explanatory of the former. The reason of this is plain: rulers are called God, because they act under him, and execute
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his laws by his own authority. The question therefore is partly answered : they that are *called God* are kings and rulers. Our blessed Saviour himself tells us who they are in the New Testament — *He called them gods, to whom the word of God came.* John x. 35. The name of God, therefore, is plainly given to *men*, on account of their office and commission under the word of God, whether they be princes, prophets, or priests ; because they act in God's stead with respect to mankind. Our Saviour, therefore, even in his human capacity, had a right to be *called God*, in virtue of his commission ; and this seems to have been the intention of his argument with the Jews, as an *argumentum ad homines*, taken from the words of their own law,

We shall obtain some farther light into the character of the man of sin, if we go on with the

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the apostles account of him. The subject, it appears, had been mentioned to the disciples before, and privately expounded to them; for, says he, *ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time; for the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth, will let, till he be taken out of the way; and then shall that wicked one be revealed whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.* This part of the description informs us, first, that the man of sin, and that mystery of iniquity which worketh for the producing of the character, was even then in the world, and would have broken out; but that, secondly, there was some restraining power, which served as a let or hindrance, to keep it down; till the time should come, when it should rise up in its true shape, and be fully displayed to the world. And, lastly, as it is to be destroyed by the actual presence of the Lord

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in judgment, it must be the *last* form of sin, or power of iniquity, that shall appear in the world. It may be worth distinguishing here, though I would build nothing upon it, that the word for *wicked one* is [not *ωονητος* but *ανομος*], *lawless*; as casting out, and renouncing, all authority of law, as well human as divine.

What has been said amounts to this: that, in the last age of the world, before the coming of Christ, there should be an actual apostasy, or departure from the Christian faith and worship: that the sinful nature of man, rising up against the powers of religion and government, which had restrained it for so many ages, should break loose, and take a form of iniquity, such as may properly be called a new revelation of sin, which the world had never seen before. More particularly, that this
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form of sin should exalt itself against the authority of God in his ministers, whether civil or religious : that it should even seize upon the temple of God, and convert it into the temple of man ; that it should exclude God, and make a God of itself, claiming the honours of divine worship. That this spirit of disobedience had always been at work ; but that there was a power which hindered it from shewing itself to the world, till the proper season ; when that restraining power should no longer operate, but be *taken out of the way*, either by the violence of man, or the just judgment of God, or by the one co-operating with the other. And finally, that this is the last and most desperate state of sin, on which Christ himself shall come to take vengeance, when its measure (of which he is the only proper judge) shall be filled up. Then shall this *wicked one*, whose sin is the

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same with that of Lucifer, the rival of the Most High ; and of Corah, who exalted himself against the authority of God in his ministers Moses and Aaron, the king and the priest ; perish as they did. Satan was cast down, and the flames of heaven followed him. The fire of the Lord came forth, to destroy Corah and his company : and after the like form shall judgment be taken on this man of sin ; who is to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall be revealed in flaming fire.

I will not omit, though it be scarcely necessary to observe after what has been said, that, in detecting the man of sin, we may use the same method as John the Baptist did for discovering the true Messiah, when he sent his disciples with this question, *Art thou he*
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that should come, or look we for another? The messengers in this case were bidden to observe, what was done by Jesus Christ, and were assured, that John would thence know for certain, who he was that did it: the works of salvation would infallibly point out the Saviour. So if we are inquiring after the man of sin, let us but observe what he does, and we shall be sure who he is. Thus for example; if instead of the sacred right of government, we find the sacred right of insurrection; instead of God only wise, the wisdom of man deified and adored in the temple of God; instead of the liberty of serving God, which is the only true freedom, the liberty of disobeying him; instead of that justice and mercy, in which only man can be like to God; the power of death, the delight of the devil, wantonly ex-

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exercising itself in destroying men's lives; instead of laws for securing property, rapine and sacrilege laying every thing waste; we desire to know, what the true man of sin, whoever he is to be, and whenever he is to come, can do more? If there could be such a thing as an actual incarnation of the prince of the infernal regions, it does not appear what he could do worse. He might perhaps display greater acts of power, as being an angel that excels in strength; but he could not commit greater acts of sin: For, what sins do we know of beyond rebellion, sacrilege, murder, and blasphemy? two of which are more than Lucifer was guilty of when he was cast out of heaven.

Little did we think twenty years ago, that we should live to see these things fulfilled so nearly as they have been: and in shewing this,

this, I shall have no occasion to invent or to exaggerate ; the facts are such as will speak for themselves ; and there is scarcely a person here present, who could not say to me what I am about to say to him. We all know, that in the neighbouring country, a direct apostacy hath taken effect. The Christian religion hath been renounced ; not negatively, through corruption of manners, or neglect of truth ; but positively, publicly, and in solemn form. The restraining power of government, and the obligations of law, have not been interrupted and defied, in the fury of tumultuous agitation, but absolutely *taken out of the way* and abolished. The *will* of a wicked nation hath been admitted as the only sovereign *law* now to be obeyed : and while the gospel teaches, that *there is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy*, we see a portentous company risen up, who take to themselves

the sublime denomination of *legislators*; not under the authority of God, but in their own right; exclusive of his legislation, and in opposition to his power. And, that nothing may be wanting to the fulfilling of the prophecy, even in the letter, the churches have been shut up from the worship of God, and opened to admit the worship of *reason*; an idol unknown to the temples of Pagan antiquity. And what is the reason here intended? It is the reason of man; that is, of the philosopher or the plowman; for the one is as much a man as the other; and where all are equal, as good a man. And what is the reason of man, but the mind of man? And what is the mind of man, but man himself; who now, as God, is actually seated in the temple of God to be worshipped. This is what the wisest man living could not have suspected some years ago; and what the most

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incredulous man cannot now deny : it is published and gloried in before the face of all people : the publication of Christianity itself was not more notorious. Government hath been murdered in the person of their prince ; sin and blasphemy of every kind, like wild beasts that have broken their chains, have overran the country. No law subsists : the will of sinful man, or of the man of sin, is a law unto itself ; and as the apostle once said, that the law was the strength of sin ; so now it may be said, the strength of sin is the law ; and there is no other. It is a law, which doth not punish robbery, but ordains it : a law, which doth not protect or save men's lives, but destroys them ; and, if it had power according to its will, would not leave one honest man upon the earth. And hereby the man of sin proves himself to be, what the apostle calls him, the *son of perdition* ; that is, the son
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of the destroyer, whose name is *Apollyon*; the son of that father, who was *a murderer from the beginning*, and leads all his children to the practice of his own favourite sin; who, in their capacity of legislators, have nothing to render them respectable, but new-invented terrors of torture and bloodshed. The prospect here becomes too shocking to be minutely delineated: every human creature, that has any feeling, must turn away from it with horror; and resolve, that if such be the world now left to us, it must surely be our duty and interest, to pray to God, that he would put an end to it; or, in the more devout and affecting language of our Liturgy, that he *would shortly accomplish the number of his elect, and hasten his kingdom.*

As the bee can extract honey from a poisonous flower, so may the Christian, when
properly

properly informed, derive comfort from every subject. Every event, whatsoever it may be in itself, is valuable to us, if the consideration of it tends to the confirming and strengthening of our faith : and how can it be otherwise, when we see with our eyes, that God is faithful and true, and that the sure word of his prophecy is daily fulfilling in the world ? This brings the truth of the gospel home to our bosoms, and makes us living witnesses of it. When the wickedness of the Jews brought down the vengeance of heaven upon Jerusalem, the time was fearful and fatal to that people ; while Christians considered the whole as an accomplishment of what their Master had foretold, and an earnest of their own approaching redemption. The more wicked this world becomes, the nearer is its end : corruption is never very remote from dissolution. This great subject will have different

ferent effects on the minds of different persons ; to some of terror, from the avenging hand of God, whom in the moment of licentiousness they have insulted and defied : to others of comfort and confidence, from the fulfilling of the Divine promises. The same waters of the flood, which drowned the world, supported that ark which preserved the family of Noah. When the world shall be in its last agonies of sin and perturbation, and men's hearts are failing them for fear ; the servants of Christ are commanded to *lift up* their *heads* (which have been bowed down under reproaches and persecutions) and to *look up*, for their *redemption draweth nigh*. That the time is actually come, for the Christians of this generation to lift up their heads, it would be rash to affirm, and perhaps weak to believe : many strange things may intervene : yet thus far, I think, our persuasion may extend with reason ;

reason ; that all the servants of God, who now are, or shortly will be, leaving this present world, may go to rest, under an assurance that their separation from the body will be short : a consideration, which to our weak minds, subject to strong impressions from the ideas of time and place, may have its use in lessening the fear of death ; and it is therefore worth encouraging.

As you have seen, from the prediction of the apostle, that the revelation of the man of sin was an event, to happen before the end of the world ; how thankful ought we to be, that it did not happen *here* : for, that the mystery of iniquity hath long been at work in this nation, cannot be denied : and it would have prevailed, but for that power which *letteth*, the restraining power of government, which it hath pleased God, of his unmerited
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goodness still to preserve amongst us. I fear there is too much truth in the assertion, that the first seeds of all this mischief were sown in Britain. Here it was, that *reason*, now deified in France, was first invested with the right of making its own religion; which, in other words, is a right of being its own God: and modern atheists have only carried that right to the point, to which it has always been tending, under the management of our deists. The lights and functions of religion can be only from God: if from man, then he is God to himself. This doctrine, in fairer words, was first started amongst us: and so was that other, that there is no power of government but from the power of the people. Here did that doctrine arise in the last century; and the murder of a king, with a sacrilegious plundering of the church, and a miserable oppression of the people, soon followed. But, through

through the mercy of God, we were not given up: our mistakes did not terminate in atheism: and may the same Divine grace still dispose us to take proper warning, and make a wise use of the example now before our eyes; that we may every day be farther from the danger, and safer from the infection, of apostacy: that the church, which God hath promised to preserve to the end of the world, may be preserved *here*; and that the little *faith* he shall find at his coming, may be found with *us*.

AMEN.

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